

Cheshire West and Chester Council

Workforce Diversity Report April 2024 – our second Be You report

Be You is the Council's commitment to all colleagues that equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) are important to us all. EDI or Be You isn't just about policy and procedure or being tokenistic, it's about creating an environment where every individual can 'bring their whole selves' to work, with no fear, anxiety or issue and that in doing so they can be the best they can be, in all that they do. Essentially you can 'Be You' linked to our THRIVE values, in particular 'respect'.

The Equality Act 2010 requires Public Bodies to publish data to show how they are meeting the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty – which includes workforce profile and other information. The Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have 'due regard' to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Having due regard to the aims of the general equality duty requires the Council to have an adequate evidence base for its decision-making. Collecting and using equality information should enable it to develop a sound evidence base and to understand the impact of its proposals and decisions on people with protected characteristics.

This report is the second to include data both from the Council's HR system (Unit 4) and also equality data gathered via an all-colleague Be You survey, which was open to all Council employees for completion during the summer and into autumn 2024. The aim of the survey was to provide a safe space for Council employees to disclose equality data, and they could choose whether to provide their name.

Analysis by protected characteristic

Analysis has taken place of the workforce make-up based on various protected groups i.e. percentage of the workforce by ethnicity, sex, age, sexual orientation, religion/belief and disability; with a view to understanding if the Council's workforce truly reflects the community it serves.

Due to self-declaration and a history of not proactively seeking employee diversity data, there is a significant amount of missing / undeclared equality data on the payroll system which makes it hard to draw conclusions about any anomalies – they may be evidence of conscious or unconscious bias; alternatively there may not be enough data on which to draw a meaningful conclusion. The inclusion of data from the Be You survey attempts to address this by providing a further source of declared data.

The Be You survey was an opportunity for Council colleagues to share their equality data, either anonymously or named. The data below is therefore taken both from declared data held on the Council's payroll system, and also from data declared in the Be You survey which was open during summer and autumn 2024. Where relevant, data on the borough's population is provided for comparison, using data from the 2021 census. Whilst the census data should not be seen as a 'target' which the Council aims to meet, it is a useful benchmark to consider whether the Council's workforce does in fact reflect the community it serves.

Sex and Gender

The Council's workforce remains **predominantly female at 74.1%** - a slight increase on 2023's figure which was **73%**.

The data above comes from the payroll system which in line with HMRC rules only holds data on gender in a binary way i.e. male or female. The Be You survey allowed participants to describe their gender in their own way. The overall male / female split was very similar to the known payroll data (**72.8%** described their gender as female, **25.8%** as male) however in addition 0.1% of respondents described their gender as 'non-binary' and a further **1.4%** stated that they preferred not to declare gender. In the 2021 census 0.3% of the borough's population declared a non-binary gender. Further surveys will refine this data over time.

The Be You survey specifically asked participants to state if they consider themselves to be Trans. No-one selected the 'Yes' option, compared to 0.1% of participants in 2023. The vast majority (**99%**) responded 'No' and **1%** stated they preferred not to say. The low rate of prefer not to say responses here is encouraging in terms of indicating the willingness of staff to disclose this data.

Ethnicity

According to the payroll data, only **1%** of Council colleagues actively selected not to disclose their ethnicity, however ethnicity is unknown for a further **41%**. This is probably because although diversity data is collected from job candidates, the data belonging to the successful candidate(s) is not automatically carried through to their employment record. Where ethnicity is known, the number of employees declaring ethnicity other than white in 2024 was 1%, with 57% declaring an ethnicity within the high-level 'wite' category.

In the 2021 census, 95.3% of CW&C residents reported an ethnicity within the high-level "White" category, a decrease from 97.4% in 2011. Therefore the number of employees self-declaring as other than white would need to more than triple to be truly representative of the population. However it's likely that the self-declared figure does underestimate the true proportion of staff belonging to non-white ethnic groups, even if by a small amount. Plans to improve data collection as discussed below within the Recommendations should address this issue.

The Be You survey data also provides an insight into the ethnicity make-up of the Council. There is a slight difference in the results from the 2023 survey to the 2024 survey, this is because in 2023 participants self-described their ethnicity. In 2024 options were provided to facilitate analysis. So an exact like-for-like comparison is not possible although a broad comparison can be made by grouping the 2023 responses together. The following high-level results are shown:

Ethnicity	% of respondents (Be You survey 2024)	% of respondents (Be You survey 2023)
Prefer Not to Say / unknown / not clear	1.9%*	2.3%
Black	1.0%	0.3%
Asian	0.9%	0.3%
Mixed	1.4%	2.8%
White	94.8%	94.2%
Jewish	0%	0.1%

**Includes 3 participants who opted to self-describe; see below*

In the 2024 survey, **3** respondents chose to self-describe their ethnicity and used the following descriptions:

- ‘Dual heritage’
- ‘Mixed - Arab/White British’
- ‘visibly white, but brought up within a black family, culturally non white’

The Be You survey data therefore shows that the high proportion of Unknown ethnicity in the payroll data can probably mostly be attributed to white ethnicities; however the overall proportion of ethnicities other than white (**3.3%**) is slightly closer to the borough population data returned in the 2021 census (**8.8%**). A reduction in the proportion of people selecting ‘Prefer Not To Say’ in 2024 compared to 2023 is also a positive step.

The above data has focussed on a simple distinction between white / black / Asian / mixed ethnicity, due to the relatively low numbers declaring as ethnicities other than white. It is acknowledged that it is good practice to carry out more detailed analysis down to specific ethnic groups to avoid over-generalisations. With more complete data, this should be possible in future. For now, a brief further analysis of the Be You data from 2024 shows the detailed split of ethnicity within each high-level group:

Ethnicity	% of respondents to Be You survey 2024
Arab	0.0%
Asian/Asian British - Chinese	0.1%
Asian/Asian British - Indian	0.5%
Asian/Asian British - Other Asian	0.2%
Asian/Asian British - Pakistani	0.1%
Black/Black British – Black African	0.9%
Black/Black British – Black Caribbean	0.1%
Black/Black British – Other	0.0%
Mixed - Other	0.5%
Mixed - White/Asian	0.3%
Mixed - White/Black African	0.1%
Mixed - White/Black Caribbean	0.4%
White - British	66.9%
White - English	18.8%
White - Irish	0.6%
White - Other	1.3%
White - Scottish	0.5%
White - Welsh	6.7%

Religion and belief

According to the payroll data, Religion / Belief is Unknown for over **69%** of Council employees. Again this is an increase on 2023 (65%), no doubt attributable to not transferring the known data from the recruitment stage. A further **11.4%** prefer not to say, leaving very little meaningful data in this area – **16.7%** Christian, **1.8%** No Religion and **less than 1.0%** for other religions.

The Be You survey data however does provide a more useful insight. Again in 2023 participants responded by self-describing, meaning exact comparison is difficult compared to 2024 where drop-downs were provided; but by grouping responses together the following high-level results are shown:

Religion	% of respondents (Be You survey 2024)	% of respondents (Be You survey 2023)
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Prefer Not to Say / unknown / not clear	8.0%*	4.4%
No Religion/Atheist/Agnostic	43.0%	42.1%
Christian (all denominations)	44.7%	48.8%
Muslim	0.4%	0.1%
Sikh	0.1%	0.1%
Buddhist	0.4%	0.1%
Spiritual	2.7%	4.0%

*including 21 who preferred to self-describe, see below

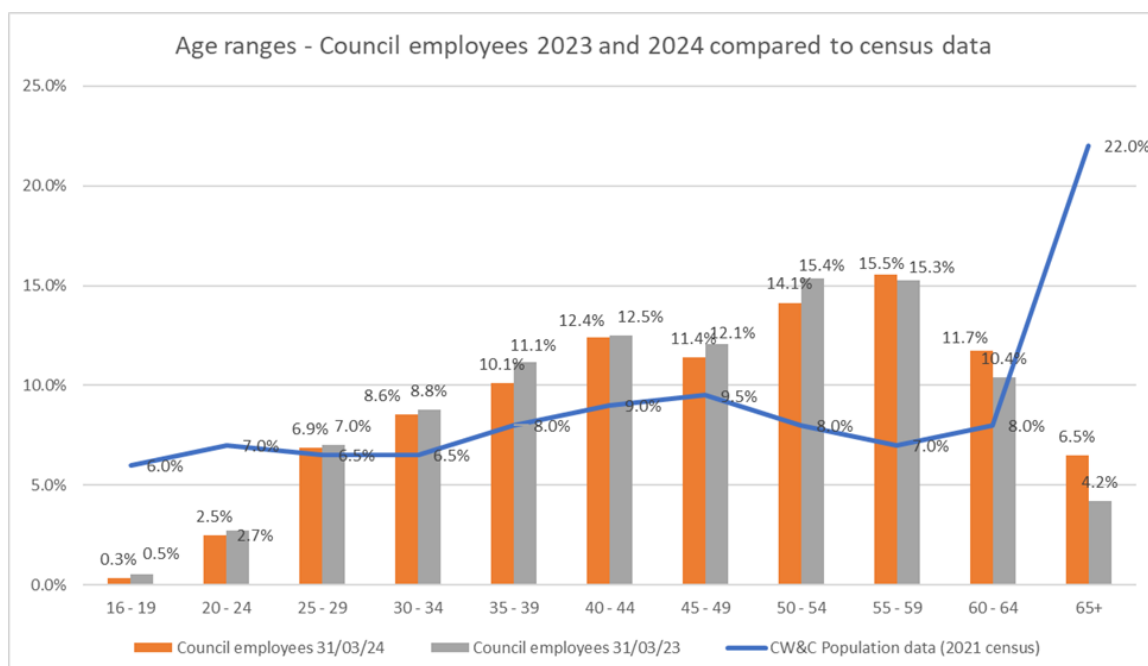
Of those preferring to self-describe (**21 respondents**), responses included:

- 'Agnostic'
- 'Atheist'; 'Atheist / Humanist'; 'Atheist / Spiritual'
- 'Catholic'; 'Lapsed Catholic'
- 'Consciousness'
- 'Help Others'
- 'Open to exploring different faiths'
- 'Pagan'
- 'Personal'
- 'Vegan'

According to the latest statistics from the 2021 census, **7.7%** of the borough's population reported a religion other than Christianity or None, again implying that religions other than Christianity are under-reported. Christianity is probably also under-reported in both the payroll data and the Be You data, given that in the 2021 census **54.5%** of the borough's population declared their religion as Christianity.

Age

The workforce profile remains older in comparison to the community. Though it should of course be remembered that by definition a working population won't include anyone under 16 and fewer at the higher and lower age ranges, which means there will be proportionally more in the age groups in between.



The Council launched its Inclusive Employment Strategy in November 2021. The purpose of the Strategy was to utilise the Council's Apprenticeship Levy for professional development activities whilst simultaneously providing accessible and supportive employment opportunities to those individuals who were underrepresented within the Council's workforce and communities, in particular younger employees. At the time of launching the Strategy, the Council had no employees under the age of 20; in March 2024 there were **13** including those with special educational needs and disability, and care leavers, all taking up meaningful work with opportunities for progression and skills development. Recruitment of younger employees at a faster rate than older employees continues to be the case – in 2022-23 just under 23% of new starters were under 30, in 2023-24 it was **27%**. And the IE Strategy has also benefitted older people who may have previously faced barriers to employment, by providing similar opportunities.

Sexual orientation

Payroll data shows **0.9%** of employees declared themselves to be gay or bisexual, compared to 0.7% in 2022 and national estimates of around 6%. A question on sexual orientation was asked for the first time in the 2021 census in which 2.8% of the borough's population declared themselves gay or bi-sexual.

As above, this is likely to be significantly under-reported within the Council staff population, as the sexual orientation of well over half the workforce is unknown. The Be You data again gives a clearer picture of sexual orientation –

Sexual orientation	% of workforce (Be You survey 2024)
Prefer Not to Say	4.8%
Straight	88.0%
Gay	3.5%
Bisexual	2.3%
Other (pansexual / asexual)	1.4%

Disability

National estimates are that around 20% of the population could be considered Disabled under the definition in the Equality Act, and in local terms in the 2021 census 17.9% of residents declared a disability or health condition that would probably meet the Equality Act definition. The definition of disability is again based on self-declaration and has always been under-reported among Council employees based on the national / local figures.

However the Be You survey data revealed a wealth of important information on staff disability or other conditions that could affect their performance or attendance. **22.1%** of respondents said they believe they are disabled under the Equality Act definition, with 4.1% declaring they prefer not to say – which is a positive reduction on 4.8% in 2023 however still a higher rate preferring not to declare than for e.g. ethnicity or sexual orientation so may indicate a wider issue over people's confidence to declare.

Participants who answered that they believe they have a disability meeting the conditions of the Equality Act were asked to select the nature of the disability, or had the option of self-describing. The results are summarised below:

Nature of disability	% of all participants (Be You survey 2024)	% of participants declaring a disability (Be You survey 2024)
Vision	0.9%	4.2%
Hearing	0.5%	2.4%
Mobility	3.8%	17.0%
Learning / remembering	0.7%	3.3%
Mental health condition (for example depression or anxiety)	2.9%	13.2%
Stamina or breathing difficulty (for example asthma or heart conditions)	0.8%	3.8%
Neurodiversity (for example Autism or ADHD)	2.9%	13.2%
PNTS	2.3%	10.4%
Self-described – examples included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arthritis • Cancer • Crohn's Disease • Chronic pain • Diabetes • Endometriosis / early menopause • Epilepsy • Fibromyalgia • IBD • Long Covid • Migraine • Multiple Sclerosis • Skin conditions 	7.2%	32.5%

It can be seen that the largest categories are mental health conditions and neurodiversity. There has been a significant increase since 2023 of disclosure of neurodivergent conditions, suggesting more confidence in disclosing them, perhaps related to a greater awareness of neurodiversity. Absence data continues to show that issues relating to mental health and mobility are among the most common reasons for absences.

Caring responsibilities

As in 2023, the opportunity was also taken to use the Be You survey to ask participants about their responsibilities as carers. In summary:

- **72%** of respondents are married or in a civil partnership
- **8.6%** are the primary carer of a child or children, with 3.1% the primary carer of a disabled child / children
- **10.1%** are the primary carer of an elderly or disabled adult
- **4.2%** describe themselves as a secondary carer

These categories can of course overlap.

It's therefore clear that a significant proportion of the Council's workforce are balancing work with caring responsibilities.

In line with the aspiration to be an employer of choice and improve all aspects of the colleague experience journey, this shows how important managerial and organisational support is for people who have disabilities and / or caring responsibilities; and is really valuable information for informing the Council's strategy and activities around wellbeing. The number of people affected shows that the Council must recognise the level of support needed, if it is to get the best and most positive contribution from its people and in order to attract and retain the staff needed to continue to deliver quality services.

Next steps

The Council has signed up to membership of Inclusive Employers, the leading membership organisation for employers who are committed to creating truly inclusive workplaces. Membership includes access to training resources and consultancy support, as well as the right to display an Inclusive Employers accreditation. HR plan to work with Inclusive Employers to set out a plan for increasing participation in declaring equality information, as well as making improvements to our learning offer for staff and managers, and reviewing relevant policies and procedures to ensure they are fit for purpose and aligned to best practice.

A number of equality network groups have existed within the Council for some time and there has been a recent exercise to review those groups, their activities and membership. Network groups exist for a number of different protected characteristics including LGBT colleagues and allies, colleagues with disabilities and a group to encourage racial and cultural inclusion and diversity. The support of the equality network groups will be crucial in explaining to the wider workforce why we need to have a better understanding of the diversity of our workforce, and how we can use that understanding to make sure everyone who works for the Council can feel a sense of belonging.

The actions below aim to address three key areas identified as requiring some improvement: data and disclosure, supporting wellbeing aligned to disability and carers, and improving diversity at senior levels.

Data and disclosure

Although self-service functionality to enable staff to update their equality information was launched at the end of 2016 and several communication exercises have been undertaken to promote this, it has not resulted in significant further uptake and there are still significant gaps in the Council's knowledge of the diversity make-up of its workforce.

2023 saw the first Council-wide Be You survey to encourage disclosure either on a named or anonymous basis. A **21%** completion rate in 2023, improving to **29%** in 2024 is a good start and a foundation for further improved participation rates as colleagues become more comfortable with sharing their data. It is intended to run a further follow-up survey during 2025 and annually, with the aim of improving participation and also eventually to use survey responses to populate equality data on the payroll system, which will support reporting in other areas (e.g. the ability to report on intersectionality, or get specific data on absence, leavers, recruitment, employee relations etc aligned to equality factors.)

It is recommended that further work be undertaken to encourage more staff to provide their information.

Wellbeing

the Council recognises that its employees face significant pressures in and out of work. Working practices need to be constantly reviewed to ensure they remain fit for purpose and achieve the stated aims of becoming an employer of choice and attracting and retaining the best talent.

It is recommended that a review of the approach to colleague wellbeing should be included in the refreshed People Strategy, and should include:

- Developing the Council's network of Wellbeing Champions to ensure they have the skills and resources they need
- Creating a suite of wellbeing resources that employees can access, and maintaining the offer
- Ensuring wellbeing is incorporated into leadership development programmes to equip managers with the skills they need to support staff
- Developing clear metrics to measure the impact of specific interventions and the overall wellbeing of Council staff

Improving workforce diversity especially at senior levels

Some aspects of diversity, especially at senior levels, have changed little since monitoring began. Work on the new Careers Site has included highlighting case studies from several different groups with the aim of promoting Cheshire West and Chester Council as an inclusive workplace where all employees can be themselves and thrive.

It is recommended that further action is undertaken with regard to recruitment, promotion and inclusivity for under-represented groups. This can be addressed with the support of Inclusive Employers, including the production of a full action plan with identified measures of success. The aim is to move overall diversity of Council employees closer to the diversity profile of the borough, as measured in the 2021 census; and in particular to increase representation at senior levels of people from non-white ethnicities.

Actions taken to achieve this can be organisation-wide or service-specific. As an example - at the Adult Social Care conference in September 2024 the ASC leadership confirmed its commitment to take part in the Social Care Workforce Race Equality Standard (SC-WRES) programme, which looks at 9 metrics to help local authorities understand their organisation in key employment lifecycle areas from an ethnicity perspective. These measures are used nationally by other organisations taking part and this allows a comparison of results and benchmarking from lessons learned.

As a first stage in the programme, information about the Adult Social Care workforce has been gathered and the next step is to establish a working group to identify priority areas for improvement and create an action plan.

The working group will meet monthly at collaboration workshops to firstly identify areas for priority consideration, create an action plan, identify support to implement the agreed actions and regularly review progress. Members of the working group will also be able to join optional monthly peer sessions with Skills for Care (online via MS Teams) where they can hear from other organisations and what kind of activities they are undertaking as part of the SC-WRES programme.

The working group will complement, not replace, valuable contributions being made by the EMBRACE colleague network and the aim is to be able to use the learning and action plans to effect similar improvements across all Council services.